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A DISSERTATION UPON The NATURE and INTENTION OF HOMER's FABLES Relating to the GODS.

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A

DISSERTATION, &c.

THERE is no Point, in which the learned World is more agreed than in their Eſteem of *Homer*. Among the Antients his Works were ſo much looked upon as the Standards of fine Writing, that not only Poets, but Orators and Hiſtorians valued themſelves upon a cloſe Imitation of his Manner. Politicians and Philoſophers were fond of embelliſhing their Diſcourſes by Paſſages of his Poems,

and confirming their Sentiments by his Authority. This fine Kind of Praiſe, by Facts (if I may ſay ſo) rather than Words, is equally expreſſive of the higheſt Regard; and if Praiſe receives its Value from the Character of the Perſon that offers it, redounds more to his Honour than the elaborate Encomiums of Grammarians and Criticks.

There is ſomething like Friendſhip in the Reſpect we pay to the Memory of an admired Author. 'Tis not a bare Eſteem; 'tis a Tenderneſs. We naturally conceive Sentiments of Gratitude towards the great Man, that gives us at once ſo much Pleaſure and Improvement; and as we wiſh, ſo we are ready to believe him exempt from the common Failings and Imperfections of human Nature. If any Parts of his Works lie more open to Exception, we endeavour, by ſtrong Colouring, to hide the Blemiſhes not only from the Eyes of malignant Cenſors, but from our own; and are

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not willing to ſee any thing, that ſhall leſſen him in our Opinion. Mankind ſo rarely errs on the good-natur'd Side, and the Inclination this way is in itſelf ſo laudable, that one cannot help being pleaſed with its Exceſſes. Fame is all the Portion the illuſtrious Dead have left them upon Earth: to defend their Characters, either as Men, or as Authors, from the rude Attacks of paultry Scribblers, is no more than Juſtice to their Manes. The Inſolence of a Son of Dulneſs, aſſuming the Chair, and daring to cenſure what he is not capable of imitating, naturally kindles a Zeal on the other Side. And if that carries a Defender beyond the Bounds of cool Judgment, and leads him to Praiſe, where he ſhould excuſe, I own I think the Weakneſs amiable.

However united Antiquity was in acknowledging the ſuperior Genius of *Homer*, there were found ſome, whoſe ignorant Pride gave them the Courage to con-

tradict the univerſal Suffrage of Men of Senſe. And I am perſuaded ſome of the beſt Critics, who engaged in his Defence, were warm'd by the Oppoſition, when they would not allow any thing excellent, that was not contained in him. 'Tis entertaining enough to ſee *Dionyſius* of *Halicarnaſſus*, a very judicious Writer, gravely proving from Paſſages of the *Iliad* and *Odyſſey*, that *Homer* was Maſter of the whole Circle of Arts and Sciences: not only acquainted with all the Knowledge of his own Times, but with the Improvements of ſucceeding Ages, and that the diſtinguiſhing Principles of the moſt celebrated of the *Grecian* Philoſophers, irreconcileable as they were to one another, were borrowed from his Poems.

It was well obſerved by an excellent Author, that the greateſt Geniuſes are liable to the greateſt Errors, both in Writing and Action. Exquiſite Feelings, a lively Imagination, and the Reſult of both theſe, quick Paſſions, muſt of Courſe tranſ-

tranſport a Poet into Fits of Enthuſiaſm, which render him for the Time incapable of attending to the nice Rules of an uninſpired Criticiſm. To be always governable is to be always cool. *Horace*'s candid Maxim is more than a ſufficient Apology for all the Faults of that admirable Author:

Verum ubi plura nitent in carmine, non ego paucis
Offendar maculis, quas aut incuria fudit,
Aut humana parum cavit natura——

it both explains and ſoftens the Expreſſion, which we might otherwiſe have thought ſevere

—— *bonus dormitat Homerus.*

To vindicate his poetical Character then, we are not obliged to maintain the Propriety of every Expreſſion, the Juſtneſs of every Figure, or the exact Dependence of every Circumſtance in his

Narratives. We may ſafely allow conſiderable Slips in all; and give him the ſmall Share in the Weakneſs of human Nature and Inadvertence, *which even he was Heir to*, without endangering, or ſo much as leſſening his Reputation with equitable Judges.

But there is another heavy Charge brought againſt him, which affects the Man, rather than the Poet. "He is ac-"cus'd, ſays one of his Defenders, of "Contempt of the Deity; there are "found ſcatter'd through both his Poems "ſacrilegious Fables, full of Madneſs "and Rebellion againſt Heaven." To break the Force of this Objection, his Apologiſts among the Antients lay down this Principle, that all *Homer*'s Fables are Allegories, which, according to the Manner of Inſtruction then in uſe, conceal'd ſome theological, moral, phyſical, or political Truth *. They examine the moſt noted

† Ἔυροις-παρ' Ὁμήρῳ ἀρχὰς καὶ γενέσεις παντοδαπῶν ὀνομάτων· ὧν ὁ μὲν ἀνόητος ὡς μυθῶν ἀκούει, δὲ

noted of them by this Rule; and ſay ſo many plauſible things, that they conclude their favourite Poet fairly acquitted of a Charge, which they alledge had no other Foundation, than the Weakneſs and Ignorance of it's Authors. 'Tis no wonder an Apology, calculated to blunt the Edge of the moſt formidable Weapon ever drawn againſt *Homer*, ſhould be readily embraced by all that wiſh'd well to his Reputation. ——Allegory, like Hieroglyphic, is extremely ductile, and ſuſceptible of any Form a ſkilful Hand would work it into; ſo that it is the fitteſt Matter in the World both for the Subtilty of a metaphyſical Reaſoner, and

ὁ δὲ φιλόσοφος ὡς πραγμάτων. By ὀνομάτα here we are to underſtand Names of divine Perſons for Arts, Virtues, Vices, and the Parts of Nature, as appears from the following Words: ἔστιν αὐτῷ καὶ αἱρεσῆς ἀρχή· ἀλλ' Ἀθηνᾶ λέγεται, &c. *Max. Tyr. Diſſ.* 16. See alſo his 29th Diſcourſe, wherein he endeavours to prove that the antient Poets differed from the Philoſophers only in the Form of Inſtruction, the μῦθοι of the firſt being the ſame in Deſign with the λόγοι of the latter; with this Advantage, that the Dreſs was more agreeable, ſtriking and venerable.

and the lively Imagination of a florid Declaimer. We can neither be ſurpriſed therefore if Men of Genius ſhould give a probable Air to their Interpretations, ſo as to pleaſe the Reader, and even perſuade him of their Juſtneſs; nor if the Effect of ſome of the moſt acute happen to laſt longer upon the Mind than the Moment one is reading them.

Some of the moſt ingenious of our modern Critics have adopted the ſame Notion: and while they agree in the Principle that the Fables are only Wrappers of Sentiments, are divided, as their Predeceſſors alſo were, in its Application, according to their peculiar Diſpoſitions, Studies, and Ways of thinking. Thoſe who are far gone in the abſtract Speculations of a myſtical kind of Devotion, are poſitive the venerable old Bard means no more by the Names, Characters, and Actions of his ſeveral Deities, than to ſhadow out and perſonalize the Perfections of the One

Supreme

Supreme Being; while others, perhaps diſguſted at the Extravagance of their piouſly-intended Dreams, chuſe to adapt their Interpretations of the ſame Stories to a freer kind of Philoſophy, and alledge, that under celeſtial Names, they preſent us only with the various Combinations of the Powers of Nature, and the Springs of Action in Men, without regard to the Influence of the Deity upon human Affairs. And tho' few will affirm the Rule to hold univerſally, yet when they attempt to put a Senſe upon ſingle Fables, which they often do, they give as great Scope to Invention, and uſe as great Latitude in the manner of explaining, as the moſt enthuſiaſtical Viſionary in this Way among the Antients. Maxims ſo ſtrongly aſſerted, with the Examples adduced to ſupport them, may very naturally miſlead an unwary Reader; for in a Queſtion of this Nature, provided one be agreeably entertained, he is not apt to be very ſollicitous on which ſide Truth es; and

gives

gives an eaſy Aſſent, where beautiful Language and natural Deſcriptions are ſupported by a Shew of Learning, and the Senſe of Antiquity.

It may therefore be of ſome Uſe, or at leaſt no diſagreeable Amuſement to one that has a Taſte for the *Greek* Poetry and Philoſophy, to conſider the Foundations of an Opinion, that ſeems to have obtained ſo much Credit in the learned World, and to examine a few of theſe philoſophical Comments, as a Specimen of the reſt.

It is not my Intention at preſent to conſider the Syſtem of the antient Mythology; how far the Principles deduced from thence were deſigned by the Fable-Framers, or how much the later Explications may owe to the fertile Inventions of ingenious Men, in Ages of more general Learning, who endeavoured to change the Opinions of their Countrymen without

out their perceiving it. My Views are confined to *Homer*'s Fables, the moſt extravagant of which, according to the abovementioned Writers, contain ſome important Senſe, not to be penetrated by the unlearned Reader.

There are two Reaſons which appear to me the ſtrongeſt Supports of this Opinion; the one drawn from the Character of *Homer* himſelf; the other from the Antiquity and Authority of his philoſophical Commentators.

For the firſt, I ſhall admit it for a good general Rule, that as Nonſenſe and Folly are not among the pardonable Faults of a good Writer, wherever the literal Meaning is palpably abſurd, and ſhocking to common Senſe, a different Interpretation muſt be embraced, if the Words will bear it; and that if any Man ſtands entitled to this candid Indulgence, it is *Homer*, whoſe Capacity, and Learning too, according

according to the Meaſure of his Times, was as diſtinguiſhed as his Fire.——— Now 'tis not in one or two Places, but all through his Poems, that we find fabulous Narratives of the Agency of Gods and Dæmons, which are no more to be reconciled with the divine Genius of the Author, than they are with the firſt Notions we conceive of a Deity. And ſince there is no other Way to clear him from the Imputation of a Credulity as impious as ſtupid, but to take them for Allegories; 'tis pretended we ought rather to receive ſuch Explications, tho' ſeemingly the moſt far-fetch'd, than allow ſo foul a Stain to ſtick to him. †

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† Ὀυ δεῖ τὰς τοιαύτας ἐξηγήσεις βεβιασμένας ἠγεῖσθαι, καὶ ἐυρεσιλογήμων πιθανότητας. λογιζόμενοι δὲ τὴν παλαίαν σοφίαν, καὶ τὴν Ὁμήρε ὅση τις φέρηται γέγονε, καὶ πάσης ἀρετῆς ἀκείθειαν, μὴ ὑπονοήσειν ὡς ἐν μύθε πλάσματι εἰκόνας τῶν θειοτέρων ἠνίαξο Porph. de Antro Nymph. p 272. Edit. Cantab. ἅπερ εἰ θεοὶ νοσοῦσιν, οὐκ ἔτι τὰς παρ' ἀνθρώποις ἀδικίας ἐδεικολάζεσθαι. Heracl. Alleg. p. 494. upon the Fable of Mars and Venus.

I don't know whether *Homer* would have thought himſelf obliged to the Philoſophers and Critics, for the great Care they take to vindicate his Piety; for after all, the Queſtion ſeems to turn upon that ſingle Point. Bold Fiction is the very Soul of narrative Poetry; and while we conſider him as a Poet, we are only concerned to find whether his Machines are right placed, probable and well conducted. Whatever the Perſons be, that are introduced, the general Rules for the Management are pretty much the ſame; Care is only to be taken, that the Action be agreeable to the Nature and Character of the Agent. Human Characters the Poet is at liberty to form with what Proportions of natural or moral Qualities he finds to anſwer his Purpoſe beſt; as long as he keeps cloſe to Nature, and preſents ſuch as may be found in real Life, that the Imitation may be juſt. When a divine Perſon appears, the Decorum is

equally

equally preſerved, if his Speeches and Actions be agreeable to the Opinions the People have conceived of him. This is the Difference between moral and poetical Truth. That a Fable and Character be conſiſtent with the latter, is all the Poet is obliged to; and no more can ever be required by the Critic.

That *Homer* did not believe his own Fables, no body ever doubted. Whether he believed the Syſtem of Doctrines they are founded upon, is a different Queſtion, and not eaſily, if at all determinable. The Prejudices of Education are ſtrong; and good Senſe and Learning are often employed to ſtrengthen, inſtead of examining them. But *Homer* had travelled into *Egypt*, as *Orpheus* had done before him. And the Applications of the Uſages of that Country in their Theology makes it more than probable, neither of them believed a Word of the Syſtem they employed ſo much Art to embelliſh. If a Man

Man happen to receive juſt ſo much Light, as to ſhew him the Falſhood of the Principles held ſacred by his Country, and wants the Means of diſcovering the Truth; the natural Conſequence is Scepticiſm. 'Tis not improbable this was all the Divinity of theſe great Men, whoſe Wiſdom contributed ſo much to civilize the Manners of *Greece*. And if they endeavoured to convey uſeful Inſtructions, upon a Plan, which perhaps they had no Hopes of reaſoning the Vulgar out of, their Caſe is the ſame with that of *Minos*, *Lycurgus* and *Numa*, who made uſe of ridiculous Opinions, eſtabliſhed by Preſcription, to deceive the ignorant Multitude out of their Barbarity and Fierceneſs.

There are two Ends of Poetry; to inſtruct and to entertain. The Religion of *Greece*, as deſcribed in *Homer*'s Poems, was very well adapted to obtain the latter; but we muſt aſcribe it to a peculiar

Dexterity and Happineſs of Genius, that he has found out a Way to deliver important Leſſons on all the Duties of ſocial Life from a Text ſo vitious, which ſeemed even calculated to debauch the Morals.

This then I take to be the true State of the Caſe; *Homer* adapted his Poems to the Religion of his Country, and ſets the Gods to work, ſuch as he found them prepared to his hand. If he himſelf did not believe them, that was reaſon enough for his being ſo bold in his Fables; that they were believed by the common People is enough to prove their Probability, and to juſtify the Uſe of this violent Machinery.

II. The Humour of turning all the Play of his luxuriant Imagination into Allegory, it muſt be own'd, prevailed pretty early among ſome of the beſt philoſophizing Critics. But it greatly leſſens the

the Weight of their Authority, that the moſt antient of them lived at ſuch a Diſtance from *Homer*'s Age, that in compariſon of him, they are even to be reckoned among the Moderns. The unſettled and unquiet State of *Greece*, divided into a number of ſmall independent Sovereignties, by turns invading and invaded, the ſtronger diſpoſſeſſing the weaker, and then yielding themſelves to a more powerful Clan, allowed them but ſmall leiſure to attend to the Arts, that poliſh Life; much leſs to enquire into Subjects abſtract from Matter, and employ their Contemplations upon the Deity. 'Tis undoubtedly much eaſier to conceive the Principles of Natural Religion and Philoſophy in their firſt and naked Form, than concealed under the Veils of Allegory, which can ſcarce ever be removed, but by thoſe that underſtood them before. The Caſe is very different with regard to to Leſſons of Morals or Politics; ſuch Truths lying near to all Mankind, and

therefore being eaſily diſcovered, and gaining great Advantage from the hiſtorical Dreſs, which ſtrikes the Imagination and Paſſions. We have a remarkable Example of its mighty Influence upon undiſciplined Minds in *Menenius Agrippa*'s admirable Fable of the Limbs and Belly, which put an End to a dangerous Diſſenſion between the Orders of the *Roman* Republic. Here Experience in the Affairs of Life, joined to good Senſe, which was always the ſame, and a very moderate Degree of Fancy, were the only Qualifications neceſſary in the Teacher. Whereas in order to apply the fabulous Manner to the ſeveral Branches of Science, one muſt firſt be familiarly acquainted with them all, and then ſearch deep for proper Images to expreſs them.

While *Greece* was in theſe Circumſtances, we hear of no body of any Eminence for Wiſdom there, who had not gone to ſome foreign Country to acquire it. The Deities

ties of *Greece* were adored before the Times of *Homer*, as appears by the Genealogies and traditional Stories handed down to him from ſeveral preceding Ages. The Ground-work being laid, it was eaſy for Learning, aided by all the Powers of Harmony, to procure a Reception to ſome *Egyptian* Improvements, that added a venerable Air to their ſacred Hiſtory, and made it ſtill more apt to work upon weak Minds.

By any thing that appears from the Hiſtory of Learning, many Generations paſſed before any Sage attempted to refine upon theſe Fables, and teach our Poet a Language ſo far from his Words. And as they don't ſo much as pretend to draw their Materials either from antient Memoirs, or Tradition; and ſupport their Interpretations only by their own Probability, that is, by the Colours they were able to put upon them; they can challenge no more Credit from us, than

they bring of Evidence, which we are as much at Liberty to conſider ſcrupulouſly in the Mouth of an Antient as of a Modern. They were indeed nearer to *Homer* in Time; but there was a vaſt Chaos between, which did not tranſmit one Ray of Light to direct the Steps of theſe Allegorizers.

The Authority of their Interpretations ſuffers beſides a great Diminution from the Variety of Turns given to the ſame Allegory by the beſt Writers in that Way. For an Inſtance of this we need look no farther than the Songs of the *Syrens*, thoſe miſchievous Charmers, that never failed to entice the Sailors, who came within Reach of their melodious Sounds, to puſh in their Ships amongſt Rocks, where they were infallibly daſh'd to Pieces. *Cicero* will have our Poet to mean the Sweetneſs of intellectual Pleaſures, which make Men once engaged in a keen Purſuit of Knowledge forget their Health and Affairs,

Affairs, and become inſenſible to the greateſt Hardſhips, Labours, and Dangers *. *Dionyſius* takes the Story for a Panegyric upon the Power of Muſic, which it required all the Wiſdom and Conſtancy of *Ulyſſes* to reſiſt †. *Heraclitus* tells us they were beautiful Harlots, who had charming Voices, and were compleat Miſtreſſes of inſtrumental Muſic; upon whom their Lovers made Shipwreck of their Fortunes; which they had no ſooner done, than they were cruelly abandoned by their fair Seducers; and that for this Reaſon they were ſaid to have the Legs of Birds ‡. And *Horace* by joining the Rocks of the *Syrens* with the inchanting Cups of *Circe*, ſeems to be of Opinion they were both intended to ſignify the groſſeſt Senſuality ||.

* Fin. Bon. & Mal. V. 13.
† Hom. Vita, p. 361. Ed. Gale.
‡ Heracl. de incredib. N°. 14.
|| Hor. Epiſt. I. 2.

Nor do the Allegorizers appear to be more determined in their own Judgments, than they are conſiſtent with one another in their Explanations. I ſhall only take one Example of two ſerious Applications of one merry Story by the ſame Author; which will at the ſame time ſhew plainly enough what Lengths this whimſical Humour of Philoſophizing will carry one.

Venus, the fair Wife of the ſooty God, was too ſenſible of the Value of her Charms to confine the Poſſeſſion of them to him alone. *Mars*, as remarkable for the Weakneſs of his Head, as for an extraordinary Strength of Limbs, always employed to the moſt miſchievous Purpoſes, accepts the Favours of which ſhe was ſo liberal. They did not manage their Intrigue with Addreſs enough to prevent a Diſcovery. *Apollo* ſees, and informs

forms honeſt *Vulcan* of the Violation of his Bed. The injured Huſband ſpreads his ſubtle Toils, which ſucceed ſo well, that he expoſed the Lovers to all Heaven. A loud Peal of Laughter is raiſed among the Gods. *Vulcan*'s Reſentment was not ſoon ſatisfied. He detained them there, thinking a World of Shame no doubt, 'till *Neptune*, in Compaſſion to their Sufferings, prevails with him to looſe the Bands.

Heraclides, one of the moſt learned and ſtrenuous Defenders of our Poet's Piety and Philoſophy, tells us, this Fable was a Fund of Calumny to the Sycophants *. But tho' it was ſung among the *Pheacians*, a luxurious, ſenſual, and lewd People, he can not ſuppoſe it poſſible even for them to put an allegorical Senſe upon it; which he finds it eaſy to do, and accordingly gives us two Solutions:

* Heraclid. Allegor. p. 495.

lutions: the firſt profoundly philoſophical; that it ſeems to be an Aſſertion of the Doctrine of *Empedocles*, the *Sicilian* Follower of *Pythagoras*, if he was not his Diſciple, that the World owed it's Order to Contention and Friendſhip. *Empedocles* was a Poet, and made uſe of this figurative Expreſſion to ſignify the heterogeneous Nature of the Elements, which in the Beginning muſt have occaſioned univerſal War and Confuſion, 'till a due Temperature of them all produced that Harmony, which is the Beauty and Stability of the Univerſe. *Homer*, ſays *Heraclides*, gives Contention the Name of *Mars*; and Friendſhip he calls *Venus*; theſe he repreſents as originally at Variance, and then mixing together in friendly Union. The Gods, on that Event, with good Reaſon laugh, and rejoice to ſee their own Graces no longer jarring to the Deſtruction of all things, but in a State of Peace and Concord. And

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in this Explanation he is followed by *Dionyſius* *.

But being perhaps ſenſible it might appear a little ſtrain'd, eſpecially as *Empedocles*'s Doctrine was not heard of till ſo many hundred Years after *Homer*'s Death, he adds another Solution, taken from common Life. It may be, he thinks, an allegorical Deſcription of the Myſtery of a Smith. Iron comes naturally enough under the Name of *Mars*, which is eaſily ſubdued by *Vulcan*; for Fire having a much greater Power than Iron, quickly effeminates it's Hardneſs. But the Workman can make nothing of that Metal without *Venus*: therefore he ſuppoſes, after he has made the Iron malleable by Fire, he finiſhes off his Work by what, in Alluſion to the Name of the Goddeſs, he calls lovely Art †. *Neptune* is a probable Agent

* Vit. Hom. p. 328.

† Δεῖ δὲ τῷ τεχνίτῃ πρὸς τὸ καλασκευαζόμενον ἢ ἀφροδίτης. ὅθεν οἶμαι διὰ πυρὸς μαλάξας τὸ σίδηρον ἐπαφροδίτῳ τινὶ τέχνῃ τὴν ἐργασίαν καλῶρθωσε.

Agent to deliver *Mars* out of the Hands of *Vulcan:* for the red-hot Maſs taken out of the Furnace is dipt in Water, which quenches and puts an End to its fiery Eſtuation.

It is needleſs here to conſider, whether either of theſe Solutions is likely to be the true one; or whether it might not be founded upon a Fact in the *Egyptian* Hiſtory related by *Palæphatus* ‡; or what elſe might be *Homer*'s Deſign. All I produced this Inſtance for, is to ſhew how little Faith is due to the fineſt-ſpun Comments, when the ſame Author can give an Air of Reaſon and Truth to various Interpretations of the ſame Fables, tho' ever ſo different from each other. If any Man will indulge the Wantonneſs of Imagination, it might be no hard Taſk to invent ſeveral other Applications of the ſame Tale, equally probable with any of them.

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‡ Palæph. Fragm. de Ferri Inventore.

As our Allegorizers were reſolved to follow out their Plan, they were certainly in the right of it to make ſo many Diſtinctions, as they have done in the Nature of Fables. One divides them into theological, phyſical, animal, material, and of the mix'd Kind *. With ſo great Latitude a Man muſt be dull indeed, that cannot ſtrike ſomething probable out of any fabulous, or legendary Author whatever. And in the Ardor of Invention, it is no wonder if he become fond of his own Progeny, and perſuade himſelf his own Dreams are the very Thoughts of the Poet. A good Writer ſeldom fails to give a reſpectable Air to what he aſſerts; and his Character ſecures another from being laugh'd at, that follows where he leads, and ventures farther in the ſame dark Path; if he can but carry a Taper of the ſame Kind, which ſhall caſt a glimmering,

* Salluſt. de Diis & Mundo, Cap. 4.

mering, ſhadowy Light upon Objects, ſo as to ſhew ſome Form, and perſuade the Reader to help out the reſt of the Piece by his own Fancy, and to ſee what he pretends to diſcover.

If *Homer* intended his Poems for an allegorical Treatiſe of Divinity, the greateſt of his Admirers muſt grant it to be a very abſtruſe one; eſpecially if we conſider the rude State of *Greece* at that Time: and there is no great Difference whether Fables have a Meaning not to be found out by the Reader, or no Meaning at all.

Our modern Critics find an agreeable Amuſement in this Allegory-hunting, beſide the Pleaſure of vindicating the good Senſe of a Poet, who will be admired as long as underſtood. The Philoſophers, the firſt Authors of the Method, ſeems to have had very different Views in it. *Homer*, in thoſe Days, was always the

firſt

firſt Book put into the Hands of Children. Their Veneration for this agreeable Inſtructor would gather Strength as Years made them more capable to diſcern his Beauties. Thus *Homer*, by giving all the Graces of Poetry to the Pagan Legends, by proper Diction, bold Figure, animated Deſcription, grand Sentiments, and beautiful Similes, became the ſtrongeſt Support of the abſurd Theology, upon which they were founded. The Paſſions, as diſtinct from the Underſtanding, are, if I may be allowed the Phraſe, the Senſes of the Soul. A few Verſes of this admirable Poet, repeated in all the expreſſive Harmony of their Sound, and addreſſed, as they are, to the Paſſions, could not fail to captivate the Mind in the moſt irreſiſtible Manner. They would naturally divert from a ſcrupulous Attention to the want of Evidence, and prevent the good Effect of an hundred Lectures of Philoſophy. The Philoſophers therefore were like to make but few Proſelytes,

ſelytes, unleſs they could contrive ſome way to weaken the Authority he had acquired over the Faith of their Countrymen. Accordingly they ſeem to have attempted to bring him into Diſcredit, by directly attacking the Opinions delivered in his Fables, as abſurd and impious. Thus, if we may believe *Diogenes Laertius* †, *Pythagoras* in plain Terms laid him under the Laſh of the Furies for the irreligious things he uttered of the Gods; and *Plato* baniſhes him from his Commonwealth for the ſame Reaſon. Neither of theſe divine Men refuſed the Aſſiſtance of *Homer*'s Writings, when they found them to their purpoſe; but as well as they both were acquainted with the Method of allegorizing, they ſaw it was not to be truſted in Points of that Delicacy and Importance. And when Philoſophy felt her Weakneſs in the Struggle with this Favourite of the Muſes, her next Courſe

† Vit. Pythag.

Courſe was to explain the moſt violent of his Machines conſiſtently with the Principles of Natural Religion. As we have no Reaſon to depend upon the Accounts the later Writers of *Pythagoras*'s Life give of his Lectures, we can't pretend to determine how far either he or his immediate Succeſſors carried this Method. We ſee however it had begun to prevail before *Plato*. But tho' he ſometimes makes uſe of it himſelf, he ſhews pretty plainly he had no Faith in it, by his damning theſe theological Fables in the Bulk, whether they were intended for Allegories or not. He ſeems to doubt whether they had any concealed Meaning; but if they had, he thinks ſome of them abſolutely incapable of Senſes conſiſtent with juſt Notions of the Deity, or with the character of a good Man *.

* That Plato's Sentiments are juſtly repreſented, will be evident to any that reads what he ſays of Poetry in his Politics. The few following Extracts I think ſufficient to

Hence we may fairly infer, that the Art of allegorizing had not acquired that Aſſurance in his Time, which it attained ſome

to juſtify my Reaſoning upon this Article ——— ἦκον οἶσθα ὅτι ἀρχὴ παντὸς ἔργου μέγιστον; ἄλλως τε καὶ νέῳ καὶ ἁπαλῷ ὁτῳοῦν. μάλιστα γὰρ δὴ τότε πλάττεται, καὶ ἐνδύεται τυπος, ὃν ἂν τις βούληται ἐνσημήνασθαι ἑκάστῳ. De Rep. 2.

After mentioning ſeveral Fables, he ſays, ὁ λεκτέοι ἐν τῇ ἡμετέρᾳ πόλει, οὐδὲ λεκτέον νέῳ ἀκούοντι, ὡς ἀδικῶν τὰ ἔσχατα ἔδεν ἂν θαυμαστὸν ποιῇ, οὐδ' ἂν ἀδικοῦντα πατέρα κολάζων παντί τρόπῳ, ἀλλὰ δρῶη ἂν ὅπερ θεῶν οἱ πρωτοι καὶ μέγιστοι. Ibid.

Πολλῶν δεῖ γιγαντομαχίας τε μυθολογητέον αὐτοῖς, καὶ ποικιλτέον, καὶ ἄλλας ἔχθρας πολλὰς, καὶ παντοδαπὰς θεῶν τε καὶ ἡρώων πρὸς συγγενεῖς τε καὶ οἰκείους αὐτῶν ἀλλ' εἴ πως μέλλομεν πείσειν, ὡς οὐδεὶς πώποτε πολίτης ἔτερος ἑτέρῳ ἀνήχθετο, οὐδ' ἔστι τοῦτο ὅσιον, τοιαῦτα λεκτέα μᾶλλον πρὸς τὰ παιδία εὐθὺς καὶ γέρουσι, καὶ γραυσὶ, καὶ πρεσβυτέροις γιγνομένοις, καὶ τὰς ποιητὰς ἐγγὺς τούτων ἀναγκαστέον λογοποιεῖν. Ἥρας δὲ δεσμὸς ὑπὸ δικὸς, καὶ Ἡφαίστου ῥίψεις ὑπὸ πατρὸς, μέλλοντος τῇ μητρὶ τυπτομένῃ ἀμύνειν, καὶ θεομαχίας, ὅσας Ὅμηρος πεποίηκεν, οὐ παραδεκτέον εἰς τὴν πόλιν, οὔτ' ἐν ὑπονοίαις, οὔτ' ἄνευ ὑπονοιῶν. ὁ γὰρ νέος οὐκ οἶδε κρίνειν ὅτι τὸ ὑπονοια, καὶ ὃ μὴ. ἀλλ' ἃ ἂν τηλικοῦτος ὢν λάβῃ ἐν ταῖς δόξαις, δυσέκνιπτα τε, καὶ ἀμεταθετα φιλεῖ γίγνεσθαι. ibid.

Speaking of his Deſcriptions of the State of the Dead, he adds, ταῦτα, καὶ τὰ τοιαῦτα πάντα παραιτησόμεθα Ὅμηρον τε καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ποιητὰς μὴ χαλεπαίνειν ἂν διαγράφωμεν οὐχ ὡς οὐ ποιητικὰ, καὶ ἡδέα τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀκούειν, ἀλλ' ὅσῳ ποιητικώτερα, τοσούτῳ ἧττον ἀκουστέον παισί, καὶ ἀνδράσιν, οὓς δεῖ ἐλευθέρους εἶναι, δουλείαν θανάτου μᾶλλον πεφοβημένους. Lib. 3.

ſome time after, when no body ſcrupled to ſtrain any of *Homer*'s Fables to his own Opinions. For with that Liberty it would have been no difficult Taſk to make them all favourable to the Cauſe of Truth, or whatever appeared Truth, and ſo to convert the moſt formidable Enemy into the moſt uſeful Friend to his Scheme, by a proper Regulation in his Republic.

If the later Schools of the Philoſophers, that built upon his Foundations, puſhed it a much greater Length, we may attribute their Boldneſs to the Succeſs of their Lectures, that had diſpoſed all Men of Taſte, and a learned Education, to a Freedom of Thought and Enquiry. The Abſurdities of Paganiſm could neither ſtand an Examination, nor admit of any other Apology. And when the Gentlemen were already reaſoned into Infidelity, the People were next to be taught to explain away their Prejudices.

dices. By this Method *Homer* was ſtill allowed to continue the Standard of the public Religion; and the Divinities retained their Names, after their Power was deſtroyed, and indeed denied by all, but the ignorant and ſuperſtitious Multitude. And ſo great Latitude it gave, that People might go to the Temples, in compliance with the Cuſtoms of their Country, and offer Sacrifice too, with all the Reverence of a ſincere Devotion, to Deities, whoſe Exiſtence they did not believe.

Whether they were in earneſt perſuaded of the Juſtneſs of their Applications of his Fables, or only acted a Part, 'tis hard to ſay. For on the one hand, Men often work themſelves into the Belief of what they are fond of believing; and on the other, theſe grave old Gentlemen made no ſcruple to advance Arguments to confirm popular Opinions directly oppoſite to what they taught in private. But

But be this as it will; the Method was far from being univerſally received. While ſome of the Philoſophers imagined they gained great Advantage to the peculiar Principles of their Sect by ſuch Interpretations, and exulted in their Succeſs; others laughed at their learned Pains, and perſiſted to accuſe the Poets of corrupting the Notions of the People by low and vitious Characters of their Deities. The Hiſtorians find their Adventures real Facts, which they ſtrip of their poetical Diſguiſe, and additional Circumſtances, and relate ſimply as handed down by antient Tradition. And where that fails, by comparing different Paſſages of the Poem, endeavour to ſeparate the eſſential Parts of the Narrative from the ornamental; the firſt they take for Truth, the latter for Colour. —— *Virgil* in the moſt learned and ſceptical Age, does not fear the Charge of giving into the Abſurdity of the vulgar Creed, when he proceeds upon the ſame Plan of Theology, which

ſtill formed the Religion of the loweſt of the Mob, and aſcribes the ſame Qualities and Paſſions to the Gods. As no body pretends to reduce his Machinery to Allegory, and *Virgil* is not the leſs eſteemed for the Liberty he uſes in working up theſe crude Materials into a Poem, as beautiful, as they are irrational; why why ſhould we ſuppoſe *Homer* did not take the ſame Licenſe with the Opinions that prevailed in his Time, when Superſtition and Ignorance would diſpoſe a much greater Number of People to receive them with Devotion? — *Virgil*'s Practice too ſeems to make it probable he did not conſider the Fables of his Predeceſſor as Allegories. One, that was ſo fond of imitating every thing he found in him, could not have overlooked the inſtructive Part, in which the Imitation had been eaſy to a Genius, ſo happily cultivated by correct Learning.

By

By what has been ſaid it appears pretty evident, firſt that *Homer* does not need the allegorical Method of Interpretation, to ſupport his Reputation as a Poet; and ſecondly, that the Antiquity of Explications, the Deſign of which is ſo eaſily accounted for, and which were never univerſally admitted among the Philoſophers, is no Argument for their being intended by *Homer* himſelf.

It may not be amiſs here to remind the Reader, that the Queſtion is not whether there be Allegories in *Homer*. No Man, that has the ſmalleſt Acquaintance with that Divine Poet, can miſs to attend to the elegant Uſe he makes of the figurative Painting upon proper Occaſions. Very beautiful ones are found in *Virgil* too. In ſhort, there is ſomething in it ſo agreeable to human Nature, that I don't know but we ſhall find, that almoſt all the fine Writers in every Age and Country have

taken this way to illuſtrate ſome Truths, and intereſt the Paſſions in their favour. And the farther we go back into Antiquity, the more frequently it occurs; eſpecially where was any immediate Commerce with the Orientals. But the Point in queſtion is, whether all his Fables of the Nature and Agency of the Gods and inviſible Beings are to be reduced to the Severity of Philoſophical Truth.

If his ingenious Advocates had gone no farther than general Aſſertions, that every one of them have a Meaning, either drawn from undoubted Truth, or the Philoſophy of his Age; the Reverence we owe to their Capacities and Characters would have excuſed our giving them an implicit Faith, had we been ignorant of the Circumſtances of *Homer*'s Times, and of the Interval between him and his Interpreters. But as by the Accounts of Philoſophers and Hiſtorians we can plainly diſcover that the moſt remote Antiquity of

of *Greece* was overſpread with a Darkneſs like that of the credulous Times of Monkiſh Superſtition; ſo it is no Diſparagement of their Wiſdom to ſuppoſe them loſt and bewildered in their Search into it. They had not wherewith to ſtrike a Light; they muſt create it *. And as they left us many of their Explications of theſe Fables, the only way to judge of the Juſtneſs of their Method is to conſider the Examples they have left us of it; for if theſe appear ſtrain'd and unnatural, it will render it highly probable, to ſay no more, that ſo great an Extenſion of Allegory was a pious Fraud, contrived to ſerve a Purpoſe, which might be in itſelf good and laudable; for ſo it certainly would, if the People could be undeceived by being deceived in a Trifle, which effectually prevented their admitting the plaineſt and moſt neceſſary Truths.

If

* That the Ignorance of the Greeks with regard to the State of Learning in their Country in former Ages is not

If I were to enter into a full and particular Diſcuſſion of this Matter, I ſhould be obliged to go through all the Action of the *Iliad* and *Odyſſey*, and collect all the different Views given of the ſeveral Parts of the Machinery of each by his Moralizers; which would not only lead me beyond the Limits of this Eſſay, but prove a Taſk of infinite Labour, and extremely little Uſe. 'Tis enough to my preſent Purpoſe to conſider, as a Specimen, a few of the Comments of *Heraclides*, in a Treatiſe he wrote to confute the Blaſphemers of *Homer*. It appears to have been compoſed when the Study of Philoſophy,

not at all exaggerated here, we may eaſily collect from Thucydides, who honeſtly tells us, the Athenians themſelves in the Time of the Peloponneſian War knew little or nothing of the Expulſion of the Piſiſtratidæ, one of the moſt important Revolutions of their State, and indeed the grand Æra of their Liberty, which happened about a hundred Years before. How can we ſuppoſe them able then, at a much greater Diſtance, to trace the obſcure Paths of Fable, and give a juſt Account of the Sentiments of their Poets, which were much leſs likely to engage the Attention of untutor'd Minds? See Thucyd. p. 7. & Lib. 6. p. 215. Ed. Steph.

phy, and particularly the Reputation of *Plato*, againſt whom he expreſſes great Bitterneſs, prevail'd over the poetical Taſte, and was like to bring our Bard into Diſcredit. I the rather chuſe to draw the Inſtances from him, that he is one of the moſt antient Apologiſts, has ſtudied *Homer* with Care, and defends him with Zeal; and that the principal things he advances have been repeated by many of the ſucceeding Writers on the ſame Subjects ‡.

The

‡ Our Critics differ widely about the Date of this Piece. Dr. Gale obſerves, that ſeveral Parts of it are quoted by Euſtathius under the Name of Heraclitus. He muſt have lived after Eratoſthenes (who was born in the 126th Olympiad) as he quotes that Author. But I cannot think him ſo late as that Gentleman inclines to place him. However that be, 'tis ſufficient for us to know, that ſeveral of theſe Interpretations I examine paſs current with ſome of the beſt Greek Writers, as well as the Moderns, are here drawn out to greater length, and ſet off to more Advantage than they are elſewhere. —— The reſt is not worth contending about. For whether he invented or borrowed them does not affect the Queſtion. I refer to the Pages of this Author, and the anonymous Life of Homer, now aſcribed to Dionyſius Halicarn. from Dr. Gale's Collection of Opuſcula Mythologica, Phyſica, & Ethica, printed at Amſterd. 1687.

The whole Weight of our Author's Defence of theſe theological Fictions reſts upon one general Principle; that the Names of the Deities denote no more than the Elements, the Parts of the Univerſe, or the moral Qualities of Men: and of conſequence, that the Actions of the Deities are the Effects of the Forces, and Powers of theſe, either in the original Conſtitution of Things, or in bringing about certain Events.

But before I proceed to examine how he adapts this Key to particular Fables, I can't help obſerving, Firſt, That as the Deities are too numerous for his Diſtribution of the Parts of the World, he varies their Denominations, ſo as to ſuit his Purpoſe. *Jupiter*, the ſupreme God, is always the Æther, which poſſeſſes the higheſt Place; and his Name Ζευς, is taken either from ζῆν, to live, as this is the principal Cauſe of the Life of Animals, or from

from ζέσις, Fermentation, the Action of Fire; *Juno* is the lower Air; *Neptune*, the watery Element; *Vulcan*, earthly Fire, and ſaid to be lame, becauſe it wants the Supply of Wood for its Continuance, as one that is lame cannot walk without a Staff. 'Tis needleſs to mention more. The Quaintneſs of ſome of theſe Etymologies, tho' they may perhaps give a probable Air to his Aſſertions with People, that look no farther than Similarity of Sounds, will be little regarded by any body that underſtands the Nature of Language, and the conſiderable Changes that happen in it in a Courſe of Ages; tho' many of the Philoſophers were fond of that popular and weak Support. Now it happens unluckily that theſe Names do not always agree with his Senſes of particular Fables; but on ſuch Occaſions ſome other Deity is introduced to occupy a Place, which was fill'd before. Thus in *Agamemnon*'s Invocation of all the chief Deities, at the Ratification of a Treaty, *Juno*

is

is joſtled out of her Diſtrict; and *Pluto* is made to ſignify the lower Air; and to ſupport that Invaſion, his Name deduced from Inviſibility, is quoted, as moſt properly denoting the Air, which is totally dark, when not penetrated by the Rays of the heavenly Orbs. *Minerva* is always Prudence, ſave upon one Occaſion, when ſhe muſt act as one of the Elements; and, to name no more, *Neptune* does not always hold his Place; for old *Ocean* and *Tethys* are put for his Element. This Inconſtancy, as it ſhews plainly how uncertain the whole Doctrine is; ſo it affords a ſhrewd Preſumption the Hypotheſis is only invented to ſerve a Purpoſe, and cannot be the Intention of the Author.

In the next Place, this Principle, were it admitted, would make the Intention of *Homer*'s Poems to eſtabliſh a Syſtem of Atheiſm; for if the Elements have ranged themſelves in their preſent Order, and pro-

produce all the Changes we ſee made in the State of Things by their contingent Motions; and if good and bad Fortune in private Life and the Affairs of Nations, is only determined by the State of the Elements, and moral Qualities; then either there is no God, which ſeems not obſcurely hinted by *Jupiter*, that is, the fiery Æther, being repreſented as the Supreme; or he is entirely excluded from the Adminiſtration of the World. While at the ſame time nothing can be plainer, than that *Homer* every where inculcates the higheſt Reverence for the Gods of his Country. In the very Entrance of the *Iliad*, he aſcribes the Anger of *Achilles*, with all it's deathful Conſequences, to the Counſels of *Jupiter*; he is the Father of Gods and Men, poſſeſt of the higheſt Wiſdom, as well as girt with Omnipotence, and pours down his Vengeance in dreadful Calamities upon Nations, that violate

violate the Laws of Juſtice and Humanity *.

And indeed, if there is any Principle plainly taught in *Homer*, it is the abſolute Dependence of Men upon the Gods. Every Turn of Fortune, Succeſs, Victory, Defeat, all are the Effects of the Deliberations, Decrees, and Actions of ſuperior Powers. *Ulyſſes*, *Diomedes*, *Agamemnon*, *Achilles*, *Hector*, make no conſiderable Motion, but under the Protection, or by the Inſtinct of one or other of the Celeſtials †. This, as well as every other Part of his Religion, contributes its Share to the Embelliſhment of his Poems. It gives a high Idea of his Heroes to merit the Attention and Favour of the immortal Gods; and whenever any of them acts a Part unbecoming his Character, this ſecures his Reputation. If *Ajax*, equal to *Achilles* in Strength and Courage, retires before *Hector*,

* Iliad. xvi. 384.
† Cic. Nat. Deorum, iii. 66.

Hector, *Jupiter* ſtrikes him with Terror.

Laſtly, This Notion is irreconcileable with *Homer*'s Accounts of the Motives, that operate with his Deities, the Addreſſes made to them, and their Interpoſitions in anſwer to their Suppliants.

Theſe Remarks are ſo obvious in the whole Tenour of his Fables, that it were an unneceſſary Labour to confirm them from particular Incidents, which occur in every Book; and ſome of them will of Courſe fall in my way again, in what I have further to offer.

It remains to conſider how our Allegorizer applies this general Principle to particular Caſes. And there is ſuch a Likeneſs in the Manner of reaſoning and conjecturing in all the Mythological Writers, that two or three of his firſt Interpretati-

ons will be ſufficient to direct our Judgment of the reſt.

He begins with the firſt Fable, which ſtands thus in the Poet.

1. The *Greeks* had taken the City of *Thebes*. Among the Priſoners was the Daughter of *Chryſes*, Prieſt of *Apollo*. The Army made a Preſent of her to their General in Chief, *Agamemnon*. *Chryſes* repairs to the Camp, with the Enſigns of his Prieſthood, and requeſts he may be allow'd to purchaſe the Liberty of his Daughter. The People, in reverence to his Character, ſecond his Petition. *Agamemnon* alone treats him with Contempt, bids him begone, and threatens, that if ever he found him there again, the ſacred Enſigns of the Majeſty of his God ſhould not ſcreen him from his Anger. The Prieſt prays; *Apollo* hears; and to revenge the Indignity offered him, deſcends with his Bow and Quiver. His Arrows hiſs through the Camp.

Camp. Firſt the Dogs and Mules, then the Men fall in great Numbers. White-arm'd *Juno* put it into the Heart of *Achilles* to call an Aſſembly of the Princes, to enquire into the Cauſe of *Apollo*'s Anger. He puts the Queſtion to *Calchas*, the moſt learned of the Diviners; who diſcovers it. *Agamemnon* and *Achilles* quarrel. But the Lady, attended by *Ulyſſes*, is ſent back to her Father, who offers an Hecatomb, and prays for the Removal of the Calamity. *Apollo* is pacified, the Plague ceaſes, and the God ſends a fair Wind in the Morning, to convey back his Suppliants to their Camp.

I have related the Story at length, becauſe moſt of theſe Circumſtances are refer'd to in the Explication.

" Great Exception is taken to this " Story, ſays my Author, that *Apollo*'s " Arrows, ſhot at random, made Ha- " vock of the poor *Greeks*, who had

" been guilty of no Crime. And ſo un-
" juſt is his Wrath, that *Agamemnon*, the
" Author of the Indignity, feels no un-
" common Share in the Calamity; but
" thoſe very Men, who call'd aloud to
" reverence the Prieſt, and take the prof-
" fered Ranſom, theſe fell Victims to the
" Obſtinacy and Wickedneſs of their
" Leader *."

His Anſwer to the Objection is in ſhort, that " upon a ſtrict Enquiry into the " Truth concealed under Epic Fictions, " he concluded, that this was not the " Anger of *Apollo*, but the Calamity of a " contagious Diſtemper, not ſent by a " Deity, but ariſing from accidental " Cauſes, and ſweeping off great Multi-" tudes, as it often happens in all Ages ‡."

For Proof, he firſt ſhews at ſome length that *Apollo* is the Sun; ſecondly, that peſti-lential

* Heraclid. Alleg p. 415. ‡ p. 416.

lential Diſtempers owe their Origin to morbific Exhalations drawn up from the Earth by the Sun, in the Summer-time; and that the Action of the *Iliad* is laid at that Seaſon of the Year, he collects from ſeveral Circumſtances of the Story; and that *Homer* attributes ſudden Deaths to the Agency of *Apollo*.

When theſe Particulars are made out, he ſets forth his Argument in its full Strength. "If, ſays he, the Seaſon is "allowed to be Summer, and Diſeaſes "are formed at that Time of the Year; "and *Apollo* has the Direction of conta-"gious Diſtempers; what remains, but "to conclude, that what happened was "not from the Wrath of the God, but a "Conſequence of the accidental State of "the Air *."

* Heraclid. Alleg. p. 424.

He further confirms his own Opinion from *Herodicus* †, who " with ſtrong " Probability aſſerts, that the *Greeks* did " not ſpend the whole ten Years before " *Troy*; but came thither about the " Time limited by Fate for its Fall. For " it would have been abſurd, as they " knew the Prediction of *Calchas*, that " they ſhould take it on the tenth " Year, and not before, to paſs ſo many " Years in Indolence, to no purpoſe. But " it is likely, that in the intermediate " Space they ſail'd up and down the " Coaſt of *Aſia*, exerciſed the Army in " War, and enriched it with Spoils; and " in the Beginning of the tenth Year, in " which Fate had determined the City " ſhould be taken, all their Forces were " drawn together before it; that the " Grounds they encamped in being low " and

† This Author is loſt; and I don't remember to have met with the Title of any thing of his; perhaps it may be that Herodicus, a Phyſician, Brother of Gorgias, mentioned by Plato in ſeveral Places.

" and fenny, when the Summer came on,
" the Plague broke out ‡."

An Hiſtorian, whoſe Buſineſs is to relate Facts, might reaſon in this Manner with a good deal of Propriety, as the moſt antient *Greek* Hiſtorian does upon other Parts of both theſe Poems*. But we muſt remember, that we are not enquiring into the Matter of Fact, the Foundation, upon which ſo ſtupendous a Structure is raiſed, but the Machinery employed by the Poet. In this View, if it be an Hiſtory, the Muſe, who inſpires him, is the Hiſtorian, and relates things conceal'd from mortal Sight; unfolds the ſecret Counſels and Reſolutions of the Deities, and the Uſe they made of Men to accompliſh their Purpoſes. What lies before us then is the Fable itſelf, and all it's Circumſtances.

 Now

‡ Heracl. ubi ſupra.
* Herodot. Lib. 2. cap. 116. & ſeq.

Now in this Light, the Reaſoning does not ſeem at all concluſive. *Apollo*, or the Sun, raiſes morbific Exhalations from the Earth, and cauſes Plagues in the Summer Time; the Plague in the *Grecian* Camp happened in Summer; therefore the Plague was accidental, and not inflicted by the Deity. For his fine philoſophical Chain is broke to Pieces, if *Apollo* was believed not the Globe of the Sun itſelf, but a Deity that directed it's Motions and Effects, and was at Liberty beſides to exert his Power in ways, which had no Connection with his Regency of the Sun. And that the *Greeks* looked upon him as an intelligent and free Agent, will, I think, hardly be denied by any body, that is but a little acquainted with their Hiſtory. We may admit therefore that the Plague was raiſed by the Sun, and at the ſickly Time of the Year too; and ſuppoſe notwithſtanding, that as the ſame Effect does not follow from his Influences, the Dæmon, who

who preſides over his Motions, might act in his proper Sphere, when he made the *Greeks* feel the Weight of his Reſentment, for the Contempt offer'd him in the Perſon of his Prieſt. Let *Apollo* ſignify the Intelligence of the Sun, and ſuppoſe him out of Humour on the Occaſion mentioned, which is agreeable enough to the Character of his Godſhip elſewhere, and he can't make uſe of more proper Arms for the Puniſhment of Men, than thoſe very Rays he is girt with.

The Circumſtances of the Fable our Author thinks extremely favourable to his Interpretation. The Sound of the Arrows he will have to mean the Noiſe the Sun, as well as the other heavenly Bodies, makes in his impetuous Motion from Eaſt to Weſt, the imaginary Foundation of the Doctrine of ſome of the Philoſophers concerning the Harmony of the Spheres.—— *Apollo* went like Night, to ſignify the Blackneſs of the Fog, which uſually hovers

vers over Places infected. — He ſat at a Diſtance from the Ships, which agrees very well with the Sun; but not with his fabled Anger; for he would undoubtedly take his Stand near to the Perſons he ſhot at.——The Dogs and Mules ſuffered firſt; becauſe by their prone Poſture more expoſed to the aſcending Vapours.—Nine Days the winged Arrows of the God flew through the Camp, is drawn from daily Experience, that the odd Days are critical in Diſeaſes.——— *Achilles* is the Perſon that ſtops the Contagion, who had been inſtructed by *Chiron* the *Centaur*, famous for his Knowledge of Phyſic.——*Juno* gave *Achilles* the Hint, to point out the clearing of the turbid Air; and for that Reaſon ſhe has the Epithet of White-arm'd.——The Army being freed from the Peſtilence went through the Ceremony of a Luſtration, uſual in ſuch Caſes.——*Ulyſſes* appears to have offered the propitiatory Sacrifice to no other than the Sun, by the Hymns ceaſing

ceaſing with his ſetting, the Devotions being continued as long as the God heard and ſaw them.———The fair Wind in the Morning he underſtands of the gentle Breeze ariſing from the Dews before the Sun arrives at the Meridian.

Some of theſe Circumſtances, it muſt be owned, are explained with Judgment and Probability. When a Plague is deſcribed, the uſual Concomitants of it cannot be omitted by an Author of much leſs Learning than *Homer*. The Thickneſs of the Air, and the Dogs and Mules falling before the Men were ſeized by the Diſtemper, could not eſcape his notice. —I ſhall not diſpute the Decorum obſerved in ſingling out *Achilles*, for the firſt Man to propoſe an Enquiry into the Cauſe of the Calamity.——His Remark upon the Propriety of the Epithet λευκώλενος, white-arm'd, applied to *Juno*, is fine; but I doubt not well-founded: for the Plague was raging in all it's Fury, when *Achilles* called

called the Princes to this Conſultation; and his Motion was to apply to all the Methods of Divination to diſcover the Cauſe, that *Apollo* might be attoned, and the Army ſaved. The State of the Atmoſphere then muſt have ſtill continued black and ſickly, ſo far from it's clearing off at the Criſis of the Diſorder.

So far, however, the Fable would agree well enough with the Allegory, that Epithet being applied on other Occaſions to the Goddeſs, where it is impoſſible it ſhould have a myſtical Senſe. But as every Trait, tho' not every Word in an Allegory ought to have ſomething to anſwer it in the Truth, there are ſeveral here, which cannot be adjuſted to this Hypotheſis, without a warm Imagination, and the ſtrongeſt Prejudice in it's Favour.——The Hiſſing of the Arrows being put for the melodious Harmony of the Spheres, of which there is not one Word any where in *Homer*; and the pretty Diſcovery of the odd Days

Days being held critical, which ſeems to have been made by the Phyſicians many Ages after him, are ſo violent Strains, that they need no Confutation.——One can hardly forbear ſmiling at his ſuppoſing the far-ſhooting God to have ſo weak an Arm, that he could not kill, unleſs he were within the Camp, and very near the Perſons he aim'd at.

But after all this torturing, the principal Facts are ſunk; Facts, upon which the whole Poem turns. The Subject of the *Iliad* is the Wrath of the Son of *Peleus*, fruitful of ten thouſand Woes to the *Greeks*. What gave Occaſion to it? *Apollo*, upon the Complaint of his Prieſt, ſent a Plague into the Camp. *Achilles* encouraged the Augur to reveal the Cauſe of the Calamity, promiſing to protect him againſt the Anger of the Mightieſt, tho' it ſhould be *Agamemnon* himſelf. On this Aſſurance he unfolds the Secret, and declares his God would never remove his heavy Hand

Hand till the Daughter of *Chryſes* was reſtored, and an Hecatomb offered. Hard Words enſue between the two Princes, which ended in *Agamemnon*'s forcing away *Achilles*'s Miſtreſs. The latter from that Moment withdrew his Aſſiſtance. ——Here is the Source of the *Grecian* Woes.

The working up of never ſo many allegorical Circumſtances into the Story, can never deſtroy the eſſential Parts of the Action. It is to no purpoſe to alledge the Abſurdity of the Notion, and that *Homer* could never be ſo credulous to believe, nor ſo impious as to vent ſuch falſe Opinions. Whatever his Deſign was, we cannot ſuppoſe he intended to repreſent his Countrymen, upon whom the *Iliad* is a Panegyric, as ſo weak and ſilly, as to imagine a Diſtemper altogether fortuitous to be ſent as a Judgment from Heaven. A God is here introduced, with as much Evidence and Pomp, and

acts

acts as much in Character, as any Deity can do. And if the Foundation of *Achilles*'s Anger be allegorical, muſt not the Anger itſelf be allegorical too, and all it's Effects of the ſame ſhadowy Nature? *Homer* turns the *Spenſer* of the Antients; but not half ſo inſtructive, becauſe unintelligible. The *Iliad* may be a Syſtem of Divinity, Morals, Architecture, or any thing elſe, that a rich Invention undertakes to make it.

2. There is no Fable, in which the Allegory proceeds ſo ſpeciouſly, as in the ſecond; where *Minerva* comes down from Heaven, to prevent *Achilles* from putting *Agamemnon* to Death. Inviſible to all beſides, ſhe takes hold of his Hair, admoniſhes him to reſtrain his Paſſion, which yet ſhe allows him to vent in Reproaches.

There is no Neceſſity to recite the learned Reaſoning of our Author upon this

this Article. His Concluſion in ſhort is, that when *Achilles* was upon the Point of uſing his Sword, the Reaſon of his Head being darkened by the Paſſions of his Breaſt, his Underſtanding awoke, and almoſt recovered itſelf from the Drunkenneſs of Indignation. The Goddeſs coming to his Aid reſtored Peace to his diſturbed Soul. But as, after all, it was no more than human Conſideration, it only cut off the Fool-hardineſs of Action; but left behind it ſome Remains of Anger: for violent Paſſions do not ſubſide at once. Reflection and Penitence are very juſtly called *Minerva* in the poetical Language. This Goddeſs is only another Name for Underſtanding; ἀθηνᾶ, that is, by the Inſertion of one ſmall Letter, to bring it nearer to its primitive, ἀθρηνᾶ, from ἀθρέω, to behold, as examining every thing by ſharp-ſighted Conſideration.

But

But whatever Appearance of Truth this Senſe bears at firſt View, we muſt remember, that *Minerva* is ſent on this Errand by *Juno*, out of an equal Regard to both the contending Princes. Now, the Nature of Allegory will not allow any of it's Agents, eſpecially a prime Mover in an Action, to ſtand as a Cypher. And indeed throughout the *Iliad*, ſhe generally accompanies, and acts in Concert with *Juno*, a Goddeſs, that ſometimes diſcovers Cunning, but has too ſtrong Paſſions to be wiſe. But they were embarked in one common Cauſe, and had each the ſame Reſentment to gratify, which is the Bond of their Union. They were both diſpleaſed at the Advantages *Jupiter* gave the *Trojans* over the *Greeks*. *Juno* flies out into bitter Words. *Minerva*, as becomes her Character, is ſilent, and takes care not to provoke the ſupreme God, who ſhe knew could play the Tyrant when his Blood

was up. However ſhe ventures once too far, againſt his ſtrict Injunctions, with his diſobedient Wife, to aſſiſt the *Greeks*. *Jupiter* ſends a terrible Meſſage to them both, and threatens to imprint his Thunder ſo deep in them, that they ſhould not heal for ten Years to come *. From *Juno* he expected no better, but expreſſes higher Diſpleaſure at *Minerva*, whom he would teach what it was to reſiſt her Father. *Iris* delivers the Meſſage in all it's Severity, with the Addition of the Epithet of audacious Bitch to *Minerva* into the Bargain ‡.

Now when I take *Jupiter* for the fiery Æther, *Juno* for the lower Air, and *Minerva* for the Perfection of human Reaſon, I can by no means reconcile the Conduct of *Minerva*, ſtanding in theſe Relations, with the other Parts of her allegorical Hiſtory. If there is a Propriety

* Iliad, viii. 399,——406.
‡ κυον ἀδδεες. ib. 423.

ty and Juſtneſs in her Addreſs to *Achilles*, her Character is loſt in the other Actions.

3. When *Agamemnon* ſent for *Briſeis*, *Achilles* in the Bitterneſs of his Heart complains to his Mother, *Thetis*, of the Diſhonour done him; inſiſts upon her ſolliciting *Jupiter* to give ſuch Superiority to the *Trojans*, as to reduce both his Countrymen, and their haughty Leader, to a Neceſſity of begging his Aſſiſtance, to protect them from *Hector*, for whom he only was an Over-match; and inſtructs her to enforce the Petition by her Merits with *Jupiter*. It ſeems *Juno*, *Neptune*, and *Minerva*, had once conſpired together to bind the ſupreme God. *Thetis* diſcovered it, and brought up to Heaven the hundred-handed Giant, whoſe Name among the Gods was *Ægeon*, among Men *Briareus*. The three Deities were intimidated at the Sight of this huge

Fellow guarding the Throne, and drop'd their Deſign.

In this Fable, " A Plot is formed, " ſays our Author, againſt *Jupiter*, the " moſt powerful Part of the Univerſe, " by the other Elements, *Juno*, the Air, " *Neptune*, Water, and *Minerva*, that is, " the Earth, who has that Name, be- " cauſe *Minerva* is the univerſal Former " of Things, and perpetually exerting " her Energy. Theſe Elements were at " firſt nearly related, by their intimate " Mixture with one another. Confuſion " began to enter among them. Provi- " dence came in to remedy this Diſorder, " and fix'd the Elements within their juſt " Limits, and is therefore properly call- " ed *Thetis*, from diſpoſing Things " in juſt Order. Many-handed Force, " *Briareus*, aſſiſted her in this Deſign ; " for it was impoſſible to reduce ſo migh- " ty Things diſtemper'd to a ſound State " without great Force."

He-

Heraclides here thinks he has given a probable and philoſophical Air to a Fable, which other Admirers of the Poet judge it ſafer to leave wrap'd up in the Darkneſs of Antiquity, and confeſs they cannot find out it's Meaning, tho' they aſſure us it muſt have had one. But to ſay nothing of the Violence offer'd to the Virgin-Goddeſs, who by the Mythological Magic-Wand, inſtead of Wiſdom, either Divine or Human, here becomes Brute Earth, only to ſerve this Purpoſe; *Thetis* for no better Reaſon appears under the Character of Divine Providence, which ſhe no where elſe ſuſtains. —— She is the Daughter of old *Nereus*, a God of the Sea, nurſed by *Juno* *, married to *Peleus*, by whom ſhe became the Mother of *Achilles*. We find her complaining of the Injury done to her Dignity, in being obliged to take a Mortal to her Huſband, now turn'd an infirm old Man, and the

* Iliad. xxiv. 60.

Griefs ſhe ſuffered for her Son, over whoſe approaching Fate ſhe ſhed many a Tear *. 'Tis Pity *Minerva*, who in another Explainer of Myſteries is Providence ‡, had not introduced the irreſiſtible Son of *Neptune*, who was ſo much ſuperior to his Father in Strength. But for *Thetis*, one of the loweſt of the Deities, who is hardly ever named, but as the Daughter of *Nereus*, or the Mother of *Achilles*, to repreſent the great Cauſe of univerſal Order, is a Strain, that Fable itſelf cannot bear.

And as her Theogony, Station, Life, and Actions, ſeem all to declare againſt this Solution; ſo it deſtroys the Coherence of this with the main Action of the Poem; for what conceivable Connection has ſuch a Tumult among the contending Elements in the Beginning of the World, or ſhortly after, quieted by diſpoſing

* Iliad. xviii. 430.
‡ Thumut. N. D. cap. 20.

poſing Wiſdom and Power, with the *Trojan* War? Or how could it be made an Argument with *Jupiter* to gratify the wild Reſentment of *Achilles* by ſuch a Sacrifice?

4. Equal Difficulties lie againſt his Senſe of the next Fable he defends.—*Juno* had perceived the ſecret Conference between her Huſband and *Thetis*, and could not but be ſenſible of the Concuſſion of the whole Frame of Nature, which attended the Motion of *Jupiter*'s Head, when he granted her Petition. And as Suſpicion, the moſt deceitful Thing in the World, ſometimes judges right, ſhe inferred from the collated Circumſtances what *Jupiter* had engaged to do; and open'd her Diſcontents pretty roughly before all the Deities aſſembled at a Feaſt. The Paſſions roſe ſo high on both ſides, that *Vulcan* thought fit to ſtrike in, to prevent Miſchief. He adviſes his dear Mother to hold her Tongue,

and not provoke *Jupiter* to proceed to Extremities; for his part, if it came to that, he durſt not interpoſe, having ſuffered ſo much on ſuch an Occaſion once before, when *Jupiter* threw him headlong from Heaven to Earth. He was a whole Day in falling, and at Sun-ſet lay breathleſs in the Iſland of *Lemnos*, where he was taken up and cheriſh'd by the Inhabitants.

We have a diverting Inſtance of the Extravagance of the allegorizing Humour in the Senſe put upon this Fall of *Vulcan* by *Crates*, mentioned by our Author.—— That *Jupiter* wanting to take the exact Meaſure of the World, impreſſed equal Motions upon two Flambeaus at the ſame Moment. One of them the Sun, flew from Eaſt to Weſt; the other *Vulcan*, from Heaven to Earth. They both reached their reſpective Points at the ſame Inſtant. ——*Heraclides* rejects this Interpretation, as a wild Conceit, and then propoſes his own;

own; in Subſtance this.——Men, in the firſt Ages, did not enjoy the Convenience of Fire. It was no Production of Earth, but drawn from above by certain brazen Inſtruments, fitted for the Purpoſe, placed oppoſite to the Sun at Noon-day. That *Lemnos* is ſingled out for the firſt Receiver of Fire, becauſe Flames iſſued ſpontaneouſly out of Vulcanos in that Iſland.

I ſhall not enquire what Inſtruments Men could make for collecting the fiery Sun-beams (for I ſuppoſe that is what he means by attracting the σπινθηρες) before Fire and the Ways of procuring it were commonly known and practiſed; nor inſiſt on the Incongruity of making *Vulcan* fall from Heaven upon *Lemnos*, if the Fire there aroſe from ſubterraneous Caverns; nor oppoſe to this Conjecture the different Accounts antient Hiſtorians give of this God: but take it, as it ſtands.

His

His direct Proof of the Identity of *Vulcan* and Fire is, that the Poets, particularly *Homer* himself, often give Fire the Name of *Vulcan*; which is easily answered from a Principle I shall have Occasion to mention by and by.

Now when we compare this philosophical Hypothesis with the general Character and Actions of the God in other Parts of the *Iliad*, I doubt they will hardly appear reconcileable to a Man, that examines without Prejudice.—*Vulcan*, the Son of *Jupiter* and *Juno*, was born lame; which gave his Father such an Aversion to him, that his Mother, to preserve him from his Cruelty, delivered him to *Thetis* to be nursed privately in the Sea. When he grew up he discovered so excellent a Genius for Mechanics, that *Jupiter* himself was obliged to him for building his magnificent Palace, as well

as

as well as the reſt of the Deities for their Manſions *. Among other curious Works he made Tripodes, that ran of themſelves to the Entertainments of the Gods, when there was occaſion for them, and returned in the ſame Manner to their Places. To make walking eaſy to himſelf, he made little Female Statues, inſtinct with Spirit, and endued with the Power of Self-motion †. In the Fable before us, to prevent the fatal Effects of the Diſſenſion between *Jupiter* and *Juno*, he riſes, performs the Office of Cupbearer, and hops about from God to God, in ſo uncourtly a Manner as to raiſe an inextinguiſhable Laughter in Heaven, and thereby reſtores good Humour and Jollity ‡. We find him afterwards, at the Requeſt of *Thetis*, making a Suit of Armour for her Son, in return for her Care of his Infancy, which he recounts to his Wife with a ſtrong Senſe of Gratitude; and

* Iliad. i. 607. † xviii. 394. ‡ i. 571.

and to that Goddeſs herſelf wiſhes it were in his Power to protect her Son from his approaching Deſtiny *.

I have now gone through the Fables of the firſt Book, in the Order I find them with their Explications in *Heraclides*. In conſidering his Expoſitions, I have entered no farther into the minute Circumſtances of the Narratives, than he leads the Way; nor drawn my Arguments againſt the allegorical Senſe from the dramatic Part, I mean the Particulars of the Dialogues between the Agents; becauſe the Laws of Allegory are no where, that I know of, ſo clearly and fully ſtated, as might be neceſſary for determining the Queſtion from ſuch Circumſtances; and what ſome might apprehend inconſiſtent with the Nature of this Figure, to others might appear a beautiful Embelliſhment of it. I have therefore laid the main Streſs upon the End,

* Iliad. xviii. 464.

End, Dependence, and Connection of each Fable with other Parts of the Action. This Method I take to be the leaſt liable to Exception. For whatever might be ſaid for the myſtical Senſe of a Story of this or that God, ſtanding as an entire Piece by itſelf, the Unity of Action in an heroic Poem requires a Conſiſtency in it's Parts, and a juſt Connection of each with the principal Fable. And if any Senſe of an Epiſode or Incident deſtroy the Probability, ſpoil the Decorum, or break the Action into independent Fables, it ſeems plainly to follow, that Senſe could never be the Intention of the Poet, whoſe Work, however various in the Parts, muſt form one coherent Body. So that if greater Latitude ſhould be given, than ever was allowed in this Figure, if one ſhould even relax Allegory into Parable, ſtill Reaſons muſt ſtand good, drawn juſtly, as I hope theſe will be found to be, from the Nature of Epic Poeſy, which admits of no Diſpute, ſince *Ariſtotle*'s excellent Obſervatons

vations upon *Homer*'s Practice ſo well aſcertained it.

It has been already hinted, that the Explications of the ſame Fable muſt differ as widely as the Principles of the Expoſitors, and the Uſes they think fit to make of them. I have not ſingled out theſe of *Heraclides* as eaſier to impugn than the reſt; but take them as a fair Sample of the philoſophical way of refining upon poetical Fictions. However different the Doctrines be, which are to be maintained, the Method of interpreting in general is the ſame, and requires the ſame Liberties.

But tho' the Uſe *Homer* makes of his Machines is abſolutely inexplicable upon the allegorical Plan, as I hope will appear evident from what has been ſaid; yet it was certainly moſt exactly ſuited to the vulgar Creed of *Greece*.

Each

Each of the Deities acted in ſome particular Department of the Univerſe; to which however they were not ſo confined, but that upon certain Occaſions they might alſo exert their Power elſewhere. For aught appears in *Homer* the *Greeks* by no means directed their Worſhip to the Elements, or Parts of the World; but to ſome Deity, or Deities, whom they imagined to preſide over theſe Parts. The Earth and Rivers were not believed to have any Divinity in themſelves; but Powers were invoked that inhabited and governed them. This is ſo well known, that it is needleſs to confirm it by a Multitude of Quotations. A ſingle Paſſage in our Poet himſelf may plainly ſhew how he underſtood it. *Neptune* acting vigorouſly in favour of the *Greeks*, in Anſwer to an Order from *Jupiter* to deſiſt, complains of his Brother's uſurping more than fell to him in the Diviſion of the World among the Sons of *Saturn*.

Heaven

Heaven was *Jupiter*'s Lot; the infernal Regions fell to *Pluto*; *Neptune* himſelf had the Sea; and the Earth was common to them all †.

'Twas by a Subtlety, which ſeems to have been ſuggeſted by this very Principle of a divine Agency preſent every where, that the Philoſophers in more enlighten'd Times were wont to excuſe their Compliance with the eſtabliſhed Religion. They did not adore, as they did not believe, a Multitude of Gods; but paid their Veneration to one and the ſame Supreme Being, pervading and diſplaying his Perfections through all the ſeveral Parts of Nature, under different Denominations. By *Jupiter* they addreſs'd him as governing in Heaven; by *Neptune* as Sovereign in the Sea; under the Name of *Minerva* they reverenced the Wiſdom, of *Hercules*, the Power of the ſame Deity.

To

† Iliad. xv. 185.

To return; the θεοὶ μερικοὶ, Gods of particular Diſtricts, were as firmly believed, in thoſe early and rude Ages, as the Exiſtence of a Cloud-compelling *Jove* himſelf; only with this Difference, that all the reſt, even in their peculiar Provinces, were ſubject to his Controul. This makes it eaſy to conceive why *Apollo*, who ſteered the Courſe of the Sun, inflicts his Vengeance by a Contagion; *Minerva*, the Goddeſs of Wiſdom, ſuggeſts moderate Counſels to *Achilles*; and *Vulcan* compliments the ſame Hero with his impenetrable Arms.

Again, their Deities differed greatly in Extent of Knowledge and Power; in their Appetites, Paſſions, Degrees of moral Qualities, Ends and Means of obtaining them; and had ſeparate Intereſts too, each of them favouring particular Nations, or ſingle Perſons, according to their Attachments to their Worſhip.——And

hence ſurely Diſſenſions and Trials of Skill in Heaven, and the Arguments they uſed to ſupport each his own Pretenſions, are accounted for much more naturally than by importing into the *Iliad* and *Odyſſey* the various Syſtems formed by contemplative Heads ſo many Ages after his Death. Such Diverſities of Character and Intereſt among them gave occaſion to the Remark in *Longinus*, that *Homer* made Gods of his Heroes, and Men of his Gods. But this is not ſo much to be charged to the account of the Poet, as of the Religion to which he adapted his Compoſitions. *Terence* furniſhes us with a very natural Inſtance of the pernicious Effect of Vices ſanctified by the Examples of Celeſtials in a young Gentleman encouraged to a Rape by the Picture of *Jupiter* falling into *Danae*'s Lap in a golden Shower.—Such Immoralities in the received Mythology drew from *Lactantius* this ſevere Reflection, that it was impoſſible for the Worſhipers

of

of the Gods to be virtuous, for that they were trained by the Gods themſelves to the Practice of Impurity *. And that this Author may not be ſuſpected as induced by his Chriſtianity to repreſent their religious Opinions as worſe than they were, the Philoſophers themſelves diſtinguiſhed Demons into good and bad; and ſome of them don't ſcruple to affirm that all thoſe, that were delighted with impure and bloody Rites, were of the latter kind †. *Plato* was well aware of the dangerous Influence theſe wicked Exploits of the Gods might have upon the moral Diſpoſitions, and expreſſes his Apprehenſions of it as plainly as *Lactantius* ‡.

* Poſſuntne inter hæc juſti eſſe homines, qui etiamſi natura ſint boni, ab ipſis tamen Diis erudiantur ad injuſtitiam? Ad placandum enim Deum, quem colas, iis rebus opus eſt, quibus illum gaudere ac delectari ſcias. Divin. Inſt. V. 10.

† Plut. Porph. & Platonici paſſim.

‡ Πᾶς ἑαυτῷ συγγνώμην ἕξει κακῷ ὄντι, πείθεσθαι ὡς ἄρα τοιαῦτα πράττεσί τε, καὶ ἔπραττον καὶ οἱ θεῶν ἀγχίσποροι, Ζηνὸς ἐγγύς. Plat. Rep. 3.

If *Homer* mixed *Egyptian* Fables with thoſe of his own Country, we cannot thence infer them to be of the allegorical Kind. What the myſtical Senſes of their Tales were, it is impoſſible to be informed, as they were carefully concealed by their Prieſts. And perhaps the Moderns have been too complaiſant to their Profeſſion, when they ſuppoſe them to have contained a precious Treaſure of Wiſdom. *Plutarch*'s ingenious Comment upon the Hiſtory of their chief Deities, in which he twiſts it all poſſible ways to bring it to Reaſon, ſeems a ſufficient Proof, that the beſt Interpretations of theſe Stories were extremely precarious. The common People certainly underſtood them in their loweſt, that is, their hiſtorical Senſe; and the Lewdneſs of ſome Parts of their Worſhip affords an ample Teſtimony it was not the Religion of wiſe Men. They ſeem to have taken the common Licenſe to conſecrate their Originals by aſcribing Divinity

vinity to their Founders and firſt Benefactors. And in this (whatever Difference there were between them in other Reſpects) they were imitated by the ſuperſtitious *Greeks*, who gave a Place in their Calendar to the Inventors of any uſeful Art; or rather to thoſe, who imported into their Country what had been long known in other Parts, with which they had little or no Intercourſe. And as they deified the Authors of Diſcoveries that were of general Utility to Mankind; ſo they gave the Names of the Deities themſelves to the Things which they believed they owed to their Induſtry or Wiſdom; thus Corn they called *Ceres*; Wine, *Bacchus* ‡. And this is the Reaſon Fire has the Appellation of *Vulcan*.

The Improvements then introduced int their Theology from that Quarter were probably no other, than ſuch as are noted by *Diodorus*; the tranſ-

 mitting

‡ Cic. N. D. ii. 26.

ferring Rites, Myſteries, and fabulous Hiſtories from *Egyptian* to *Grecian* Heroes, as the *Orgia* of *Bacchus* applied by *Orpheus* to the Son of *Semele* *. The *Egyptians* had a judicial Proceſs on the Characters of deceaſed Perſons, whoſe Bodies were carried over the *Acheruſian* Lake near *Memphis*, to a Field, where People of the greateſt Figure were buried, by a Boatman called *Charon*. Judges ſat, and heard formal Accuſations and Defences of their Conduct; and according to the Evidence laid before them, either granted or denied the Rites of Sepulture. On this Proceſs *Homer*'s infernal Judges, all *Grecian* Heroes, are plainly founded †, with ſeveral other Circumſtances too well known to be recounted here. Now in theſe Innovations, whether introduced by *Orpheus*, or any other, and improved by *Homer*, I can ſee the happy Invention of the

* Diod. Lib. i. 58. Ed. Steph.
† Diod. p. 61.

the Poet, but no Veſtige of an Allegory.

To mention no more Particulars, as the *Egyptians* divided their Hiſtory into the Ages of Gods, Heroes, and Mortals; we find the ſame in Effect in that of the *Greeks*, with whom the moſt remote Times produced their Deities; and theſe were ſucceeded by the Sons of the Gods. Hence, among other Inſtances, *Homer* tells us the Name of *Briareus* in the Language of the Gods was *Ægeon*; which is thus explained by his Commentators, the one Name is more antient than the other.

The antient *Greeks* were full as rude and ſimple as the firſt *Romans*; and their Guides were not leſs knowing and politic, as appears by the artful Management of their Oracles. So that there is not leſs Reaſon to believe the former ſincere in the Devotions paid to their *Bacchus*, *Caſtor*, *Pollux*, *Hercules* and *Theſeus*, than

the latter in giving divine Honours to *Æneas* and *Romulus*.

Theſe few general Remarks are ſufficient to my preſent Purpoſe. Such then was the primitive Religion of *Greece*; ſo mean and wicked the Characters of their Deities; and ſuch the Belief of the Vulgar, even in the moſt learned Times of Heatheniſm. If it ſeems too abſurd to be ſwallowed by Creatures endowed with Reaſon, we ſhould conſider that the common People, whether for want of Opportunities, Leiſure, or Inclination to examine, give an implicit Faith to their Teachers; and the Reverence conceived in Childhood for their Anceſtors and Parents, and for the religious Tenets they inherited with their Fortunes, was increaſed by the Craft of Prieſts, whoſe Intereſt lay in keeping them in Ignorance. They durſt not even ſuſpect they were in an Error. Strength of Genius, and ſome happy Coujunctures, gave the moſt antient Phi-

Philoſophers Courage to ſhake off their Fetters. They open'd the Way for others. We have already ſeen the Reaſon they had to diſguiſe the ridiculous Opinions of their Fathers, and why we cannot be determined in this Article by *Euripides* *, or any other, whoſe Authority is made uſe of by our Apologiſt. Men of Senſe the Country always produced: but what will not Men of Senſe believe in Points they never examine? —— In fine, general Conjectures can by no means ſtand againſt plain Facts. And that their Theology was ſo groſs might be eaſily evinced not only from the Teſtimony of the Hiſtorians, but from the Influence it had upon the Conduct and Politics of their ſeveral States.

Now

* To confirm his Account of Homer's Jupiter, mentioned above, he quotes theſe Lines from Euripides:

ὁρᾷς τὸν ὑψῦ, τόνδ' ἄπειρον αἰθέρα,
ὃν γῆν περιξ ἔχουθ ὑγρᾶις ἐν ἀγκάλαις;
τοῦτον νόμιζε Ζῆνα, τόνδ' ἥγου θεὸν.

As the Play this is taken from has not come down to us, we can't tell that it is meant to deſcribe Homer's Jupiter. But ſuppoſing it to be ſo; Euripides is to be ranked among the Philoſophers.

Now as it appears to any Man at firſt View, that *Homer*'s Fables, the Characters and Actions of the ſeveral Deities fall in very naturally with this Plan of Religion; and as they cannot be brought to any other Senſe without violent Contortions, and after all leave conſiderable Difficulties behind; it ſeems to amount to a pretty ſtrong Proof, that theſe Fables were not deſigned by him for Allegories.

I need not make an Apology to the greateſt Admirers of our Poet for offering my Objections to an Opinion, which is thought by ſome to redound to his Honour. *Homer* is above Detraction. Whoever attempts to leſſen his Character, will only conſecrate his own to Contempt. 'Tis a ſufficient Teſt of his Merit, that he has pleaſed every underſtanding Age, in every Country, for three thouſand Years. And I don't know that we

we are ſo much indebted to any thing, as to the Veneration for this God of the *European* Poets, for the Formation of the true claſſical Taſte, and for the Recovery of it when loſt, firſt in *Roman* Luxury, and then in *Gothic* Barbarity. Every Age has its Characteriſtic in Compoſition and Stile. As Knowledge, Virtue and Liberty, have declined, all the Species of falſe Wit, favoured by ſeveral other Circumſtances, have prevailed in their Turns; and the Perverſeneſs of Faſhion has drawn the greateſt Men into certain Meanneſſes, which are the Reproaches of Works admirablein all other reſpects. But when *Homer*'s Excellency was acknowledged, and Authors of a true claſſical Taſte, formed by his Example, and by the Precepts and Writings of thoſe, that underſtood and imitated him, aroſe from time to time to point out his Beauties, a Reformation never failed to take place. Puns, Conceits, epigrammatic Points, Fuſtian, and Bombaſt,

baſt, fell of courſe before the pure Language of Nature, of which he was the true Standard, and perhaps contributed as much to accompliſh the Orator, as the Poet. The Nature and Extent of his Poems gave room for all the Varieties of fine Writing, of which he ſhews himſelf a perfect Maſter. Art can do no more than trace the Ways of Nature. The Poet pleaſes, inſtructs, warms, and even works up to a ſtrong Enthuſiaſm every Reader, who has Muſic in his Soul. The Work of the Critic is only to explain the Reaſon of what the Unlearned feel, they don't know why.

In ſhort, we need not endeavour to raiſe him higher by pretending to find in his Works Syſtems of Theology, and Philoſophy, which he never intended to form; or by ſuppoſing him poſſeſt of Knowledge, which he had no Opportunity to acquire, and to ſpeak a Language his Coun-

Country did not underſtand. His own Perſpicuity, Propriety, Elegance, abſolute Command of the Paſſions, expreſſive Harmony, and inimitable Majeſty, will always ſecure him the firſt Place in poetical Fame.

The END.

Country did not understand. His own Perfection, Propriety, Elegance, absolute Command of the Passions, expressive Harmony, and limitable Majesty, will always secure him the first Place in poetical Fame.

THE END.